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14.II Are creoles a special type of language?

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14.II.0. Introduction

Why should there be a field of pidgin and creole language studies? Since the languages are not all genetically related, nor spoken in the same area, they must be considered to have something else in common in order to be meaningfully studied as a group. In the field there is an implicit assumption that the creole languages share some property that calls for an explanatory theory. What property this is depends on the theory concerned. Any of three properties are assumed to play a role (I will limit myself here to the creole languages, since pidgins raise a series of issues of their own):

- (i) Creole languages are assumed to be more *alike* than other languages.
- (ii) Creole languages are assumed to be more *simple* than other languages.
- (iii) Creole languages are assumed to have more *mixed* grammars than other languages.

These assumptions play a role in the various theories of creole origin in the field, theories which can be organized in terms of two dominant intellectual traditions: *historicism* and *romanticism*. The historicist tradition stresses the continuity of transmission of conventions and institutions, and the romanticist view stresses discontinuity and the intervention of (human) nature. Table 1 presents these theories, grouped as either romanticist or historicist, in relation to the three underlying assumptions of being alike, simple, and mixed. Before going on to discuss these properties in more detail, I will briefly sketch the nine theories listed in the table.

The *semantic transparency theory* is not a full-blown genesis theory, but simply claims that the structure of creole languages directly reflects universal semantic structures. The fact that they are alike, in this view, is due to the fact that the semantic structures are universal. They are simple because the

Table 1. *Theories accounting for the supposed properties of the creole languages*

	Alike	Simple	Mixed
ROMANTICIST THEORIES			
<i>Semantic transparency</i> (Seuren 1983; Seuren & Wekker 1986)	x	x	
<i>Imperfect second language learning</i> (Andersen 1983)	(x)	x	
<i>Baby talk</i> (Naro 1978)	(x)	x	
<i>Bioprogram</i> (Bickerton 1981, 1984)	x	x	
<i>Common social context</i> (Sankoff 1980)	x	(x)	
HISTORICIST THEORIES			
<i>Afro-genesis</i> (Alleyne 1981)	x		x
<i>Portuguese monogenesis</i> (Whinnom 1965)	x	(x)	x
<i>Atlantic mono-source</i> (Hancock 1986)	x		
<i>Regional European variety</i> (Bosman 1923; Raidt 1983)	(x)	(x)	

semantic structures involved fairly directly map onto surface structures, without a very complex transformational derivation.

In the *imperfect second language learning theory*, creoles are the crystalization of some stage in the developmental sequence. The speakers of the proto-creole simply did not have sufficient access to the model, and had to make up an approximative system. In this view, the fact that creoles are simple is due to the simplification inherent in the second language learning process. For some adherents of this view, the creole languages are also similar, and this similarity is due to universal properties of the learning process.

The *baby talk theory* is similar to the imperfect second language learning theory in postulating that creoles are frozen stages in the second language learning sequence. The difference lies in the fact that in the baby talk theory the responsibility for the simplification is shifted from the learners to the speakers of European languages, who provide a simplified model. The similarity between creoles would be due, in this view, to universal properties of the simplified input.

The *bioprogram theory* claims that creoles are inventions of the children growing up on the newly formed plantations. Around them they only heard

pidgins spoken, without enough structure to function as natural languages, and they used their own innate linguistic capacities to transform the pidgin input from their parents into a fully fledged language. Creole languages are similar because the innate linguistic capacity applied is universal, and they are simple because it reflects the most basic language structures.

The *common social context theory*, finally, among the 'romanticist' approaches, adopts a strictly functional perspective: the slave plantations imposed similar communicative requirements on the slaves, newly arrived and without a common language, in many cases. The commonality of the communicative requirements led to the formation of a series of fairly similar makeshift communicative systems, which then stabilized and became creoles.

The *Afro-genesis model* really deals only with the creole languages spoken in the Atlantic region (West Africa and the Caribbean) and postulates that these languages have emerged through the gradual transformation of the West African languages spoken by the slaves under influence of the European colonial languages. The similarity of the languages involved is due, in this model, to the fact that they share the same African language features, mixed together with features of European languages. To be fair to this model, I should add that similar explanations have been proposed for creoles in the Pacific and in other areas.

The *Portuguese monogenesis model* has undergone several modifications. Crucial to all of these is the existence of a trade language with a predominantly Portuguese lexicon, used in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries by traders, slave raiders, and merchants from different countries throughout the then emerging Third World. The monogenesis theory holds that the slaves learned this language in the slave camps, trading forts, and slave ships of their early captivity, and then took this language, really no more than a jargon, with them to the plantations. The different creole languages as we know them are based on this jargon, but have replaced the Portuguese words by words from other European languages. The supposed similarity of the creole languages is due of course to the underlying Portuguese jargon, and their simplicity to the simplicity of this jargon. The creoles may be mixed, finally, because different colonial languages may have added structures to the Portuguese jargon, with the result that the present-day creole languages show some differences, as well as similarities.

The *Atlantic mono-source hypothesis* limits itself to the English-based creole languages of the Atlantic. Its central idea is that there was an English jargon or pidgin spoken along the coast of West Africa from which a wide range of English-based creoles were later derived. Clearly, common features of these creoles are then assumed to be due to this early pidgin.

The *regional European variety theory* holds that creoles essentially reflect nonstandard, dialectal features of the colonial languages, the result of

migration by dialect speakers to the newly founded colonies, compounded by the existence of a strongly dialectal 'nautical language'. In this theory, similarities between creoles hold only for those derived from one colonial language; creoles may be simple because the nonstandard varieties were simpler than the written national standard.

In all these models or theories, notions such as 'alike', 'simple', and 'mixed' play a role. They are in fact taken for granted, assumed to be the thing to be explained, and therefore not called into question. The contribution that the study of creole languages can make, in my view, to grammatical theory is that it can help to elucidate the three concepts 'alike', 'simple', and 'mixed'. All three turn out, I think, to be relevant to the central concerns of modern grammatical theory. In order to see this, let us examine the concepts involved more closely. When we say that languages *x* and *y* are more alike than *y* and *z*, we are claiming in fact that in the total (abstract) variation space allowed for by the human language capacity *x* and *y* are closer than *y* and *z*. Consequently, the claim that the creole languages are more alike than other languages implies a clustering in the variation space. If we think of the variation space as defined by parameter theory (as in recent work by Chomsky and others), trying to develop a notion of 'alike' really boils down to developing a theory of parameters, parameters along which similarities and differences between natural languages can be defined.

Consider now the concept of simplicity. The idea that creole languages are simple has been taken to mean two things. On one level it has meant that creole languages do not have a rich morphology; on another, that the overall grammar of creole languages is less complex than that of other languages. Both interpretations are relevant to grammatical theory. The idea that absence of morphology is related to grammatical simplicity needs to be evaluated in the context of contemporary research into morphology-syntax interactions, and the grammatical status of inflection or INFL (Chomsky 1982; Rizzi 1982, and others) and of case marking (Stowell 1981). Even more importantly, the idea that the creole languages are not grammatically complex in general only makes sense if one has a theory of grammatical complexity to fall back on, and this brings in markedness theory. Consider next the notion of mixedness. Mixing implies that elements of one language are put together with elements of another one, and this in turn calls into question the cohesion of the grammatical systems involved. Recall Tesnière (1939) voicing the consensus on this issue: 'La miscibilité d'une langue est inverse à sa cohésion.' The tighter a particular subsystem (e.g. the vowel system, or the system of referential expressions) is organized, the less amenable it will to restructuring under borrowing. Tightness of organization in modern grammatical theory is conceptualized within modularity theory: the grammar is organized into a set of internally structured but externally

independent modules, the interaction of which leads to the final grammatical output. For this reason, the notion of mixing is important: it forces us to think about which parts of the grammar are tightly organized, and hence about the notion of modularity. Tightness of organization or cohesion may have either a paradigmatic dimension, in terms of the hierarchical organization of feature systems, or a syntagmatic dimension, in terms perhaps of the notion of 'government' (Chomsky 1981) as a central principle of syntactic organization.

Keeping this in mind, then, the potential contribution of pidgin and creole studies to grammatical theory is clear. The whole idea of talking about the creole languages as a group presupposes that we have come to grips with one or more of the core notions of grammatical theory:

alike:	parameter theory
simple:	morphology-syntax interactions
	markedness theory
mixed:	modularity

Studying creole languages implies a constant confrontation with these notions, and helps one to develop a vocabulary to deal with them. In this paper I will look at empirical evidence for the three concepts mentioned, organizing the discussion as much as possible around one construction type: serial verbs. These have been discussed in several important recent contributions, including Bickerton (1981), Sebba (1986), and Byrne (1987), and are illustrative of the contribution that pidgins and creoles can make to grammatical theory.

I should be honest and say right out from the start that my own perception of the evidence from contemporary creole grammatical systems is that creoles may well share a number of typological properties, but that they are neither particularly simple nor unmarked. With respect to mixedness, things are not clear. It is not the final *result*, however, that is relevant to grammatical theory, but the *reasoning* required to arrive at a particular result.

4.II.1. **How similar are the creole languages?**

At first sight, the creole languages are remarkably similar. The following examples, taken from different language groups and from different areas of the world, give an indication of this:

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| (1) | wanpela man i bin skulim mi long Tok Pisin | Tok Pisin |
| | one man PR ANT teach me in Tok Pisin | |
| | 'A man was teaching me Tok Pisin' | |

- (2) sō mō ka ta toka pálmu Senegal Kriol
 one hand NEG HAB touch palm
 ‘One hand can’t touch its palm’
- (3) m te pu bay lazā Haitian
 I ANT MD give money
 ‘I had to give the money’

Examples such as these have features in common, as set out in (A)–(C) below.

(A) *Word order*

It is remarkable that the large majority of the creole languages are strictly SVO. For the English and French creoles this is not so surprising, of course, given French and English SVO word order. For Portuguese- and Spanish-based creoles, with a lexifier language (the language that has provided most of the vocabulary) characterized by frequent VSO patterns, and for Dutch-based creoles, with a lexifier language characterized by underlying SOV coupled with a verb-fronting rule, some explanation is, however, called for.

Now one explanation might be that all the substrate languages involved, e.g. the West African languages originally spoken by the slaves that were transported to the Caribbean, are SVO languages. Recent work by Koopman (1984) and others suggests, however, that the underlying order of a number of West African languages may well be SOV, with a verb-fronting rule applying in almost all contexts. In addition, Smith, Robertson & Williamson (1987) have shown that one Caribbean creole language, Berbice Dutch (spoken in Guyana), is directly related to the completely SOV language Ijo, as well as being derived from an underlyingly SOV language, Dutch, and the result is still a straightforward SVO system:

- (4) ϵk wa jefi-a kali kali
I ANT eat DUR little little
'I was eating very little'

(B) *Preverbal particles*

All the examples (1)–(4) include preverbal particles: In (1) we have a predicate marker *i* and an anterior marker *bin*; in (2) the negative element *ka* and the habitual marker *ta*; and in the Haitian example (3) the anterior marker *te* and the modal *pu*. In (4) we have the anterior marker *wa* and the durative suffix *-a*. Much work by creolists of various theoretical backgrounds has been dedicated to discovering the regularities in the preverbal particle system and *grosso modo* it boils down to something like the phrase structure rules in (5):

- (5) a. S → NP AUX VP
 b. AUX → (negation)(predicate marker) tense, mood, aspect
 c. Tense → anterior
 Mood → irrealis
 Aspect → perfective, progressive

Particularly (5c), and to a less extent (5b), have many exceptions, as pointed out in a number of recent articles and reviews of Bickerton (1981), a study in which preverbal particles play an important role in arguing that there are remarkable structural and semantic similarities among the creole languages. These similarities, in Bickerton's view, can only be due to innate linguistic capacities of the children who created the creoles on the basis of the pidgin input of their parents. Still, there is no doubt that the very existence and overall similarity of the preverbal particle systems needs to be explained by a theory of creole genesis.

(C) *Morphological simplicity*

Seen from the perspective of the European lexifier languages, the creole languages have very little inflectional morphology. This has led in the past to primarily negative characterizations of these languages: languages without properties *x*, *y*, and *z*. In (1)–(3) verbs have no tense and person marking, nouns lack case and number marking. Any number of the theories presented above can account for this feature of the creole languages, as the reader may wish to ascertain.

A natural conclusion to draw from the absence of inflectional morphology is that it explains why there is no subject–verb inversion in the creole languages based on Portuguese and Spanish, and why subjects have to be obligatorily present even in these languages (Rizzi 1982). Compare (6a) with (6b) and (6c):

- (6) a. e ta kome Papiamentu
 he ASP eat
 ‘He is eating’
 (cf. Spanish *él está comiendo*)
 b. *ta kome
 ASP eat
 (cf. Spanish *está comiendo*)
 c. *ta kome maria
 ASP eat Maria
 (cf. Spanish *está comiendo María*)

This conclusion is only partially correct, however. It is not the absence of inflection, but rather the absence of pronominal features in the INFL node

that accounts for the contrasts mentioned. This is clear from the data on Hawaiian English Creole given in Bickerton (1981). There is no inflection but there may be a pronominal element that is part of the preverbal particle cluster, and hence there is the possibility of inversion:

- (7) a. sam gaiz samtaimz *dei* kam
 'Sometimes some guys come'
 b. difren bilifs *dei* get, sam gaiz
 'Some guys have different beliefs'

It remains to be seen to what extent other creoles present isolated instances of pronominal elements in INFL, allowing for pro-drop. Promising candidates are Tok Pisin and Papiamentu, where 1st and 2nd person pronouns sometimes appear to be part of the cluster of auxiliary particles. Hence the parameter of not allowing for pro-drop may not be completely general among the creole languages.

Having mentioned three properties that the creole languages share, we now turn to a feature in which we find large differences among creoles: serial verbs. Serial verb constructions are characterized, to put it in simple and perhaps provocative terms, by more than one verb per clause. Some examples:

- (8) e-l-a *bula bay* Papiamentu
 he ASP fly go
 'He flew away'
- (9) li *pote sa bay mo* Guyanais
 he bring that give me
 'He brought that for me'
- (10) dem go in *tek im go bak* Gullah
 they go and take him go back
 'They are going back with him'

In addition to the main content verb, another verb or set of verbs is used to mark an additional dimension of the predicate. In (11) I list some of the additional verbs found, together with the modification they bring about:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| (11) <i>Locational:</i> | 'come' | Direction towards |
| | 'go' | Direction away |
| | 'surround' | Around |
| | 'be' | Locative |
| <i>Argument:</i> | 'give NP' | Benefactive, dative |
| | 'take' | Instrumental, comitative, object |
| | 'say' | Finite complementizer |

<i>Degree:</i>	'pass (NP)' 'suffice'	Comparative, 'too much' 'Enough'
<i>Aspectual:</i>	'finish' 'return' 'be'	Perfective Iterative Locative, continuative

Other verbs are involved as well in individual languages, but the ones listed in (11) are the most important ones. Much more descriptive work is needed to determine which creole languages have which serial constructions. At present it seems that Haitian and the Surinam creoles Sranan and Saramaccan have the widest range of serial constructions. We can distinguish several semantic categories, as indicated in (11), and in addition there are a number of lexicalized combinations.

In contrast with the features of SVO word order, preverbal particles, and absence of inflection, the feature of serial verbs is not common to all creole languages. There are major differences between them in this respect, and at least three groups must be distinguished. I use the presence of the serial verb 'take', perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, as a diagnostic feature because this verb plays such a central role in the expression of grammatical relations:

(12) a. *Creoles with serial constructions, including 'take'*

Saramaccan
Sranan
Haitian
Krio
Gullah
Jamaican
Guyanais

b. *Creoles with serial constructions, but no 'take'*

Sao Tomé
Tok Pisin
Principe
Negerhollands
Papiamentu

c. *Creoles without serial verbs*

Philippine Creole Spanish
Hawaiian Creole English
Senegal Creole Portuguese
Mauritian Creole
Seychellois
Reunionais

This diversity poses considerable problems for the notion that all creole

languages essentially share one grammar. Creolists have been aware of this, of course, attributing the diversity to any of three historical causes:

(a) Creoles were originally similar, but historical developments (particularly the type of colonial society and the proportion of different ethnic groups) have caused different degrees of deviation from the original basilect subsequent to the genesis of the creole languages.

(b) Creoles have been subject to different amounts of substratum influence, either because the slave populations were not equally homogeneous linguistically or because their numbers varied.

(c) The emerging creoles have been subject in different degrees to influences from the superstrate languages. In some early plantation societies there were a great many Europeans, in others very few.

There is no doubt that all these factors played a role, and a number of recent historical studies show the usefulness of careful documentation of the circumstances of creole genesis, but I very much doubt that we can explain away, in this fashion, the differences between the grammars of the different creoles.

Before turning to the notion of simplicity, I should mention one other difference between the grammars of the creole languages, a difference that has played a role in recent discussions about parameter theory: preposition-stranding (van Riemsdijk 1978; Kayne 1981). In fact, there turn out to be three types of creole languages with respect to stranding, as presented in (13):

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| (13) a. <i>Stranding allowed:</i> | Jamaican
Krio |
| b. <i>Stranding not allowed:</i> | Saramaccan
Sranan
Haitian |
| c. <i>Stranding with trace spell-out:</i> | Papiamentu |

This is the same kind of parametric variation that we find among the European languages, and it is difficult to find an independent explanation for it. One could argue, for instance, that Jamaican allows stranding (the marked option?) under the influence of English, but the same could not hold for Krio. We return to preposition-stranding below.

14.II.2. Are creole grammars simple?

We will couch our discussion of simplicity in creole grammars by turning once again to serial verbs. How can we explain the presence of serial verbs in the creole languages? One type of answer lies in *category theory*. Serial verbs, such an answer might run, come in lieu of the use of prepositions; this category is absent since basic creoles only have nouns and verbs. A second

type of answer lies in the theory of the *lexicon*: Serial verbs emerge because the basic creole verb is a two-place predicate, and some additional way is needed to mark grammatical relations. Let us look at both types of answer, discussed in Bickerton (1984), since both presuppose some kind of simplicity. Suppose we adopt the categorial features of Chomsky (1972), as in (14):

- (14) a. Nouns [+N, -V]
 Verbs [-N, +V]
 b. Adjectives [+N, +V]
 Prepositions [-N, -V]

We have two basic maximally opposed categories, nouns and verbs, one mixed category, adjectives, and one neutral category, prepositions. A theory of markedness could make any one of three predictions, as set out in (a)–(c) below.

- (a) A maximally unmarked system has just the opposed categories in (14a).
(b) The unmarked system has just the feature $[\pm N]$, resulting in a system such as (15):

- (15) Nouns, adjectives [+N]
 Verbs, prepositions [-N]

- (c) The unmarked system has just the feature $[\pm V]$, resulting in a system such as (16):

- (16) Nouns, prepositions [-V]
 Verbs, adjectives [+V]

Creolists elaborating the notion of an unmarked category system will find little use for (15) and (16), since there are no obvious ways to relate nouns to either prepositions or adjectives. Superficially creole systems would be roughly as in (17):

- (17) a. Verbs, adjectives, (prepositions)
 b. Nouns

Evidence for adjectives being a subclass of ‘verbals’ derives from their behavior in predicative constructions, as is shown in the following example from Saramaccan:

- (18) a. a bi waka ‘He walked/He had walked’
 b. a bi mangu ‘He was thin/He had been thin’

While it is true that in Saramaccan adjectives of the class in (18) behave like verbs, there is a process of reduplication that creates true adjectives (Alleyne 1987), as in (19) and (20), if we take the presence of a copula to indicate that the complement is not a verb:

Table 2. *Basic prepositions in five creoles*

Haitian	Saramaccan	Krio	Principe	Negerhollands	
ak	ku	wit	ki	mit	'with'
na/kote	a		na	(n)a	'to'
na	a	na	na	(n)a	'in'
pa			po		'through'
su		pan			'on'
ka(y)	a	klos/to	na		'at'
pu	fu	fo	pa	fo	'for'
sā	sondo		si		'without'
žis	tée	ric	te	tee	'until'

- (19) di mii bunu 'The child is good'
 di mii de bunbunu 'The child is fine'
- (20) a satu 'It has been salted'
 a de satusatu 'It is salty'

Sebba (1982) has argued for Sranan, as well, that adjectives need to be distinguished from verbs, even though they are superficially similar.

Let us now turn to the category of prepositions, more directly related to the issue of serial verbs. The hypothesis that serial verbs emerged because the creole languages had no category preposition in their initial stages will have to confront at least two objections. First, all creole languages, including those with extensive serialization, have the category preposition, as Table 2 demonstrates. These selective data show that even languages with extensive serialization possess a number of prepositions. Further research will reveal more prepositions, probably, since this is an under-researched area in creole linguistics. Thus it is not the absence of the category of preposition as such that gave rise to serial constructions.

The second objection to be made is that only a small number of serial verbs is used instead of prepositions, as our chart (11) illustrates. The use of serial verbs to mark aspect, degree, or location must have another source. Quite generally speaking, we find that the formal pattern of serialization is not linked to any specific semantic category, in the same way that the formal pattern of P+V phrase formation in Dutch (e.g. van Riemsdijk 1978) is involved both in marking grammatical relations, marking location, and lexical extension.

It should be noted that serial verbs have characteristics that differ from those of prepositions: they allow for stranding, and they can be involved in predicate cleft (cf. Jansen, Koopman & Muysken, 1978). Consider the contrasts in (21) and (22), taken from Sranan:

- (21) a. *a nafi san a e koti a brede *nanga* [e]
the knife that he ASP cut the bread with
'The knife that he cuts the bread with'
b. san edgar *teki*. [e] koti a brede
what Edgar take cut the bread
'What did Edgar cut the bread with?'
c. san edgar *koti* [e]
what Edgar cut
'What did Edgar cut?'

The preposition *nanga* in (21a) cannot be stranded, while the serial verb *teki* in (21b) can; in this it is similar to an ordinary verb, as in (21c). Similarly, serial verbs can appear in predicate cleft constructions, (22b), just like ordinary verbs, (22c), while prepositions can't, (22a):

- (22) a. *na *nanga* edgar koti a brede *nanga* a nafi
be with Edgar cut the bread with the knife
'With the knife (really) Edgar cut the bread'
b. na *teki* edgar *teki* a nafi koti a brede
be take Edgar take the knife cut the bread
'Really with the knife Edgar cut the bread'
c. na *koti* edgar *koti* a brede
be cut Edgar cut the bread
'Edgar really cut the bread'

Thus, grammatically serial verbs and prepositions are very different categories.

For these reasons, to explain the emergence of serial constructions by assuming that creoles have or had a much simpler category system, without prepositions, is not a promising line of research. The same holds for the idea that in the early creoles all verbs were simply two-place predicates, and that serialization is actually argument extension. The second objection to the absence of preposition hypothesis, that serial verbs are not only involved in argument extension, holds for this hypothesis as well, and furthermore, all creoles have double object constructions. Examples are given in (23):

- (23) a. ham a gi de man si gout Negerhollands
he ASP give the man his gold
'He gave the man his gold'
b. mi ke pindja i wan soni Saramaccan
I want tell you one thing
'I want to tell you something (in secret)'

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| c. | bo a duna mi e buki | Papiamentu |
| | you ASP give me the book | |
| | 'You have given me the book' | |
| d. | mi soim yu banara bilong mi | Tok Pisin |
| | I show you bow PREP me | |
| | 'I show you my bow' | |
| e. | mō pu deman mō papa morso larzā | Seychellois |
| | I MOOD ask my father bit money | |
| | 'I shall ask my father for a little money' | |
| f. | li rakōte papa-li istwa sa-a | Haitian |
| | he tell father-he story this | |
| | 'He told his father this story' | |

All these examples show double object constructions, and on purpose I chose a number of them from languages of which the European lexifier language has no double object construction: Saramaccan and Papiamentu with a Portuguese lexical base, Haitian and Seychellois with a French lexical base. The inescapable conclusion is that creoles do have three-place predicates and this invalidates the possible explanation for the emergence of serial verbs.

In fact, Principe Portuguese Creole exhibits a contrast between the double object construction and the serial construction, as shown by Gunther (1973):

- (24) pwé sa dá mínu dyó / da dyó da mínu
 father ASP give child money / . . . give money give child
 'Father gives the child money / . . . gives money for the child'
- (25) n ka futá mwí mē dyó / . . . futá dyó da mwí mé
 I ASP steal mother my money / . . . steal money give mother my
 'I stole money from my mother / . . . stole money for my mother'

In the double object construction the meaning of the sentences depends on the semantics of the main verb, but when a serial verb is added, a specific interpretation associated with that verb is brought in.

Thus it seems that any explanation for the emergence of serial verbs that claims that they were called upon for a specific semantic function will not work. Can we find a more formal explanation, still maintaining the assumption that creole languages are simple in a theoretically interesting way? One way to explain the emergence of serial verbs would be to say that it is simply the optionality of the subject inside of S that would constitute a simplification, allowing for verb phrases to occur as constituents separate from any subject. The disadvantage of this is that it would be rather stipulative: why are subjects optional? Is the optionality of the subject a parameter in itself (the subject being optional being the unmarked option)? It seems to me that

the second interpretation of simplicity that we have discussed could be promising: the formal separation of V and INFL in creoles may have as its effect that verbs no longer automatically have subject associated with them, since the subject is required by INFL rather than by the verb itself. This frees the verb phrase from its primary function (in nonserializing languages) of being the predicate of the subject, and allows for all kinds of other (secondary) predications: aspect marking, degree marking, marking of additional arguments and of additional locational information.

14.II.3. **Are creole grammars mixed systems?**

The idea that creole languages are mixed systems, resulting from the matching of an African, Oceanic, or Asian syntax with the lexicon of a European language is quite old. We find it in Schuchardt's (1921) study of Saramaccan, Turner's book on Gullah (1949), Comhaire-Sylvain's work on Haitian (1936), and more recently in Alleyne's work on the Caribbean English-based creoles (1981). The idea of a lexicon-syntax matching is as attractive as it is misguided, however. There is a host of grammatical differences between the creoles and the African etc. languages that they are related to. It must be a smaller set of features, then, that was incorporated into the creole languages.

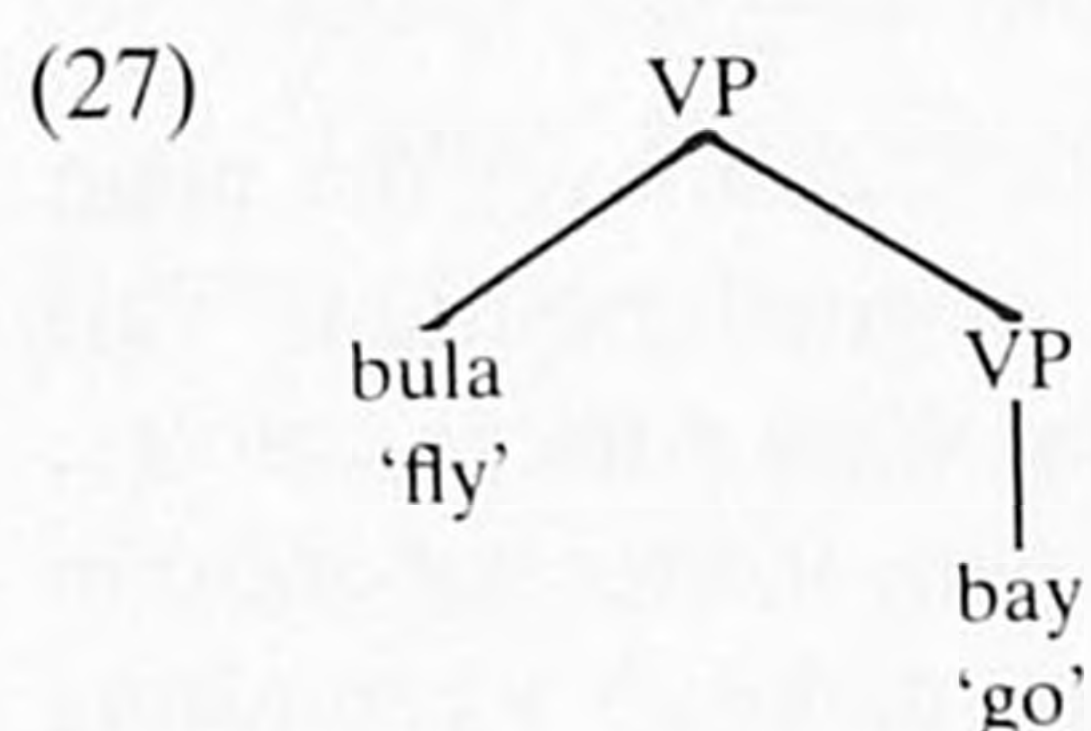
To ascertain this set forces us, as well, to define the feature transferred in very precise grammatical terms. I will illustrate this with two grammatical phenomena: predicate cleft and serialization.

Predicate cleft was illustrated briefly in example (22) above: the main verb appears twice, in focus position and in its original position. This construction occurs in most, if not all, Caribbean and West African creoles, as well as in an important subset of the African languages. It does not occur in the Indian Ocean or Pacific creoles. This distribution makes it a promising candidate for postulating a substratum origin. There is considerable syntactic and semantic variation in this respect between the creole languages, however, which would need to be explained. Predicate cleft is interpreted as intensification of the action expressed by the fronted verb in some languages, and as focussing on that action in others. In addition, the locality restrictions vary considerably from creole to creole, as shown in (26):

- (26) a. Unbounded predicate cleft (subject to island conditions) in African languages and Haitian (Piou 1982; Koopman 1984; Clements p.c.).
b. Clause-bound predicate cleft in Papiamentu (Muysken 1978).
c. Predicate cleft across one clause boundary in Sranan and Saramaccan (Sebba 1986; Byrne 1987).

The parameter-setting allowing for predicate cleft suggested by Koopman (1984) will only work effectively for (26a) and may not even carry over exactly to Haitian. The fact that predicate cleft in the Caribbean creoles may be a much more local phenomenon than in the African languages could point to a restriction on substratum influence that it can only involve local features. If this insight could be made precise, we would have a way of defining conditions on mixability of components in terms of their locality.

Just as predicate clefts, serial verbs are a plausible candidate for substratum influence. They are a common feature of the Kwa family of West African languages, occur in most West African and Caribbean creoles, and they do not occur in the Indian Ocean and Pacific creoles, with one exception – Tok Pisin (and there it may be possible to claim substratum influence from Austronesian languages). Again, however, lexical variation with respect to serial verbs between the different creole languages makes it hard to define what exactly was transferred. If it is possible for VPs to occur as secondary predicates, dissociated from INFL, as suggested above, why can certain verbs participate in this feature but not others? If it was actually a property of lexical items, i.e. certain verbs, that was transferred, why do we have innovations in the New World in serial verb use, such as Saramaccan *poi* (from ‘spoil’) as a kind of degree marker with negative connotations? Similarly to predicate cleft in the creole languages, serialization is a local phenomenon in that it always involves an immediate government configuration, as in (27), a structural representation of the serial verbs in (8):



If we can think of serialization in the creoles as having resulted from language ‘mixture’, again we may consider it a local kind of mixture.

The substratum hypothesis has as much chance of being correct as any other hypothesis about creole genesis, but the very brief discussion of predicate cleft and serialization illustrates the kind of conceptual and empirical problems it still faces (in addition to those pointed out by critics of the substratum idea, such as Bickerton 1981). Still, the notion of mixture forces grammatical theorists to think very precisely about what a grammatical feature exactly is. To conclude, thinking of creole languages as alike, simple, and mixed is far from unproblematic. The very notion of a ‘creole’ language from the linguistic point of view tends to disappear if one looks closely; what we have is just a language.

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14.III A dialog concerning the linguistic status of creole languages

Derek Bickerton

In Pieter Muysken's stimulating, informative, and comprehensive overview of creole theories there are unfortunately one or two misinterpretations of my position. While I have claimed that creoles are more *alike* than other languages, and have suggested that they may be in some sense more *natural* than other languages, I don't think I have ever explicitly stated that they are more *simple*: the whole concept of simplicity in language is strewn with epistemological and other landmines, and should perhaps be avoided altogether.

Again, on a minor point of detail, it is not the case that 'around them, [first-generation creole children] only heard pidgin spoken.' Obviously, they also heard an indefinite number of ancestral languages; these, however, they ignored, precisely because the elaboration of the pidgin represented, to them, far less of a task than the learning of an ancestral language and the subsequent transfer of features from that language to the nascent creole. The nature of the bioprogram rendered input from other languages quite unnecessary for them.

In light of the approach sketched in the present chapter, two of Muysken's 'core notions', parameter theory and morphology-syntax interactions, simply fall together: parametric variation is relegated to the lexicon and the interaction between a variable morphology and invariant principles of syntax is what in fact produces the so-called 'parametric differences' among languages. As for markedness, it is no longer clear to me that this concept is helpful. Rather than claim that creoles have (largely) unmarked lexical and morphological properties, I think I would prefer to say simply that, due to the stripping process of pidginization, they inherit fewer such properties, and it is this paucity, rather than a particular (unmarked) type of property, that gives creole languages their high degree of similarity.

As for the differences between creoles that seem so salient to Muysken, these are predictable from the simple fact that (due to circumstances described above) the number of morphological items inherited by different

creoles, and the number of original properties that these items retained, were both variables. It is no accident, for instance, that the creoles that have few or no serial constructions are those that inherited the largest amount of superstrate morphology, while the creoles with the most serial constructions are precisely those that inherited least morphology from their superstrates.

Muysken tackles, and predictably routs, the straw-man argument that preposition loss was the cause of verb serialization. But of course it was not only prepositions that were lost; complementizers, adverbs and members of other categories were lost too, and verbs were recruited to discharge the functions of these. Naturally, such verbs retained many of their verbal properties – in many cases they could be fronted, stranded and so on. There is nothing either surprising or contrary to the present position in the range of facts that Muysken points out.

But even in the specific case of the relationship between ‘case-marking’ serials and preposition loss, Muysken’s main argument – that creoles often preserve the corresponding prepositions, and that therefore serial verbs did not have to be introduced for government or case-marking purposes – goes through only under the assumption that creole languages were homogenous from the beginning. But this assumption is counter to fact in most, perhaps all, cases. A variety of factors, including the early colonial demographics referred to above, a rigid system of social stratification, and the isolation of geographic regions and even single plantations from one another, produced in most cases a variety of dialects rather than a single homogenous creole. In some cases, these dialects leveled or merged; in others, e.g. Haiti, they remain fairly separate even today; in others, e.g. Guyana, they formed a stable continuum; in Surinan, they gave rise to several distinct languages.

What this means is that in many cases, dialects *without* preposition *x* (and thereby forced to develop serialization) existed alongside dialects *with* preposition *x*, and thus without serials. If these dialects subsequently merged, both expressions would continue to exist side by side in the same language. Such a development is clearly apparent in Saramaccan, with its joint stock of Portuguese and English lexical items. It is no accident that the instrumental (*ku*) preposition is from the Portuguese stock while the instrumental serial verb (*tei* ‘take’) is from the English stock. Clearly, the English-influenced members of the original Saramaccan population did not inherit a preposition (there is no reflex of *with* in the language) and therefore had to recruit an English verb to govern and case-mark nouns with instrumental θ -roles; however, the Portuguese-influenced contingent did inherit the appropriate preposition, and therefore did not develop a Portuguese serial verb.

In other cases where instrumental prepositions and instrumental serials are found side by side, there are good reasons for supposing that the former

was originally a comitative – for instance, Sranan *nanga*, which also appears as an NP (but never as an S) conjunction. Muysken's Table 2 will soon disabuse the reader of any suspicion that prepositions were inherited with their superstrate functions and properties intact. None of the equivalents of *to* can have a dative (or indeed any other than a locative) reading in any creole; few of the *for* equivalents will take a benefactive reading. On the other hand, equivalents to *to* and *in* have fallen together in at least four out of Muysken's five creoles (as well as in many he does not mention). Finally, one should note that only three out of eight basic prepositions (the ninth, *until*, is only a complementizer in most creoles) have reflexes in all five creoles. Certainly, as Muysken claims, prepositions constituted a class in all creoles, but that class was a severely defective one, and where particular prepositions were missing, verbs (the only other [–N] major category) were the only things that could be recruited to fill the gaps.

Since Muysken is very properly suspicious of the substratophile approach, he finds himself without any explanation of serial constructions. Indeed, his conclusion that 'the substratum hypothesis has as much chance of being correct as any other' seems strangely at odds with the material that he himself has surveyed. On the substratum side, as Muysken is fully aware, there is a dearth of hard facts and a singular lack of coherent argumentation. In contrast, the bioprogram hypothesis is backed by massive evidence from language acquisition and socio-historical data as well as from comparative creole studies; alone among the 'theories' (many hardly worthy of that name) that Muysken lists, it provides a coherent and self-consistent account of all aspects of the creolization process that fits both the creole data and what is known about how language in general is acquired and transmitted.

Pieter Muysken

The major innovation presented in Derek Bickerton's, in many ways lucid and insightful, paper is the attempt to embed the language bioprogram hypothesis as presented in Bickerton (1981, 1984) within the lexical learning hypothesis developed by Borer and Wexler at the University of California at Irvine. Quite independently of what we think about the latter approach to linguistic variation (my personal view is that its very simplicity holds promise, at least as a research program), Bickerton's adopting it raises a number of issues.

The first one is primarily methodological. The proposal is that we should look at three categories of morphemes in contemporary creoles:

- (a) those maintained from the lexifier language in some form, e.g.
Sranan *waka* from English *walk*;

- (b) those that have been lost and not been reconstituted in the creole, e.g. English agentive *by*;
- (c) those that have been lost and the meaning of which is expressed by some other element, e.g. the English complementizer *that*, which appears in Sranan as *taki* (from *talk*) as a factive complementizer and as *di* (from *disi* 'this') in relative clauses.

Now what morpheme falls into what category is not by itself revealing: a number of factors (frequency, morphophonemic simplicity, phonological saliency, phonological markedness, grammatical complexity, perhaps also semantic transparency) may intervene in retention or loss. What is claimed to be important is the distinction between (b) and (c), and the paper falls back on markedness theory, in combination with the idea of a single universal grammar (UG) contained in the lexical learning hypothesis, to explain why certain 'core' elements fall into (c) and others into (b).

What concerns me at this point is the assumption, implicit in this approach, that the vocabulary of the pidgin is a fairly simple function of the vocabulary of the lexifier language: if the latter has n words, the pidgin has simply a proper subset of those n . Perhaps the lexical entries have lost some of their features, but they are assumed to be basically the same lexical entries. This assumption runs counter to the possibility that what went on in the very early stages of language contact was massive restructuring of the vocabulary of the lexifier language. Restructuring could have come about through relexification or second language learning.

In relexification, the abstract properties of lexical entries of the native languages of the slaves are matched with phonological representations from the lexifier language (this possibility is rejected as relevant to pidginization by Bickerton, to be fair). In second language learning, the abstract properties of the lexical items of the lexifier language are simplified and reinterpreted.

In fact, the word *morpheme* is used ambiguously, both for the phonological form and for the abstract lexico-semantic-syntactic category or feature expressed by that form in the lexifier language. A more adequate classification would be something like:

- (a) neither form nor content retained
- (b) form retained, different content
- (c) content retained, different form
- (d) both form and content retained

From what we know of the evolution of pidgins, L2 learner systems, and creoles, there are many cases of (b) and (c), many of them documented by

Bickerton in earlier work. This makes it very difficult to find out from an inspection of the present-day creole lexicon what lexical items or morphemes the pidgin had or didn't have, as Bickerton proposes.

The other problem with linking the language bioprogram hypothesis directly to the lexical learning hypothesis is that the latter assumes an invariant UG and the former relies heavily on some notion of markedness. The main attraction of Bickerton's original idea was that it explains the observation that many creoles have very similar preverbal tense/mood/aspect particle systems, by assuming that these are unmarked in the AUX component of UG. Now within the notion of an invariant UG of Wexler & Borer there is no place for markedness in the syntax. There may be more or less marked sections of the lexicon, but that is it. Now it is hard to recapture Bickerton's original insight within a lexical account: what is particularly lexical about the notion of anterior tense? Perhaps the whole original notion that creoles are unmarked systems semantically was misguided, but so far it remains as the most substantial contribution of Bickerton to the field. Now there is no base for it.

These critical remarks notwithstanding, the focus on the creole lexicon in the present chapter is long overdue, and when used with caution will lead to exciting research.